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## THE TWO VERSIONS OF "GRONGAR HILL"

John Dyer, the Welsh poet, is remembered today, in so far as he is remembered at all, for an interest in external nature unwonted in his time, and for the sonnet written in his honor by Wordsworth which closes with the assurance:

"Pure and powerful minds, hearts meek and still,  
A grateful few, shall love thy modest lay,  
.....  
Long as the thrush shall pipe on Grongar Hill!"

The poem alluded to by Wordsworth is that upon which Dyer first built his fame. He is said to have planned it at sixteen. If so, his plan was tentative; for in addition to the version which has come down to us in Chalmers' *English Poets*, he left an earlier version now almost wholly forgotten. This earlier version appeared, along with three or four other pieces by Dyer, in Richard Savage's *Miscellaneous Poems and Translations* in 1726. Its successor, usually assigned to 1727, also appeared in 1726.<sup>1</sup>

The earlier version, even when known, has been decried. Thus John Scott of Amwell in his *Critical Essays* called it "an irregular ode, . . . very incorrect"; and Edward Thomas in his edition of Dyer in the *Welsh Library* has recently dismissed it with the statement that it "displayed some unattractive Pindarism and the antics of that day" and "was not significant."

The mere fact that the poem both concerns itself with a subject from external nature and was published in the same year with Thomson's *Winter* gives it an importance that justifies a comparison of the two versions. Of these the second, if not familiar,

<sup>1</sup> So far as I know, this fact has not hitherto been pointed out. For a knowledge of it, and for other assistance in this article, I must express my thanks to Dr. Raymond D. Havens, of the University of Rochester. Dr. Havens in the course of some researches in the Harvard Library discovered that the second version of the poem is included in *Miscellaneous Poems by Several Hands, Publish'd by D. Lewis, London, 1726*.

The discovery, while of genuine interest, does not affect the likelihood that the Savage version is the earlier. Before 1785 Scott of Amwell had said definitely that it is; Dodsley, in his collection of Dyer's *Poems* in 1761, printed the more familiar version instead of the Savage; and this external evidence is strongly supported by the internal evidence.

is at least accessible. The first, however, is so rarely seen that an essential part of my task will be to quote it entire:<sup>2</sup>

## I

- Fancy!* Nymph, that loves to lye  
 On the lonely Eminence;  
 Darting Notice thro' the Eye,  
 Forming Thought, and feasting Sense:  
 [5] Thou! that must lend Imagination Wings,  
 And stamp Distinction, on all wordly Things!  
 Come, and with thy various *Hues*,  
 Paint and adorn thy *Sister* Muse.  
 Now, while the Sun's hot Coursers, bounding high;  
 [10] Shake Lustre on the Earth, and burn, along the Sky.

## II

- More than *Olympus* animates my Lays,  
 Aid me, o'erlabour'd, in its wide surveys;  
 And crown its Summit with immortal Praise: }  
 Thou, awful *Grongar!* in whose mossy Cells,  
 [15] Sweetly-musing *Quiet* dwells:  
 Thou! deep, beneath whose shado'wy Side,  
 Oft, my sick Mind serene Refreshment took,  
 Near the cool winding of some bubbling Brook:  
 There have I, pensive, press'd the grassy Bed,  
 [20] And, while my bending Arm sustain'd my Head,  
 Stray'd my charm'd Eyes o'er *Towy's* wand'ring Tide,  
 Swift as a Start of Thought, from Wood to Mead,  
 Glancing, from dark to bright, from Vale to Hill,  
 Till tir'd Reflection had no *Void* to fill.

## III

- [25] Widening, beneath the Mountain's bushy Brow,  
 Th' unbounded Landskip softens off below;  
 No skreeny Vapours intervene;  
 But the gay, the splendid Scene,  
 Does Nature's smiling Face all *open* shew,  
 [30] In the mix'd Glowings of the tinctur'd *Bow*.  
 And, gently changing, into soft and light,  
 Expands immensely wide, and leads the *journeying* Sight.

## IV

- White, on the rugged Cliffs, old *Castles* rise,  
 And shelter'd Villages lie warm and low,  
 [35] Close by the Streams that at their *Bases* flow.

<sup>2</sup> I quote from the copy in the British Museum. For a painstaking comparison of my hasty transcript with the original I am indebted to Dr. James Hinton, of Emory University, and Dr. Paul Hamelius, of the University of Liège.

- Each watry Face bears pictur'd Woods, and Skies,  
 Where, as the Surface curls, when Breezes rise,  
 Faint fairy Earthquakes tremble to the Eyes.  
 Up thro' the Forest's Gloom, distinguish'd, bright,  
 [40] Tops of high Buildings catch the Light:  
 The quick'ning Sun a show'ry Radiance sheds,  
 And lights up all the Mountain's russet Heads.  
 Gilds the fair Fleeces of the distant Flocks;  
 And, glittering, plays betwixt the broken Rocks.  
 [45] Light, as the Lustre of the rising Dawn,  
 Spreads the gay Carpet of yon level Lawn:  
 Till a steep Hill starts horrid, wild, and high,  
 Whose Form uncommon holds the wond'ring Eye;  
 Deep is its Base, in Towy's bord'ring Flood,  
 [50] Its bristly Sides are shagg'd with sullen Wood:  
 Towers, ancient as the Mountain, crown its Brow,  
 Aweful in Ruin, to the Plains below.  
 Thick round the ragged Walls pale Ivy creeps,  
 Whose circling Arms the nodding Fabrick keeps;  
 [55] While both combine to check th' insulting Wind,  
 As Friends, in Danger, mutual Comfort find.

## V

- Once a proud Palace, This,—a Seat of Kings!  
 Alas! th' o'erturning Sweep of Time's broad Wings!  
 Now, 'tis the Raven's bleak Abode,  
 [60] And shells, in marbly Damps, the inbred Toad.  
 There the safe Fox, unfearing Huntsmen, feeds;  
 And climbs o'er Heaps of Stone to pendant Weeds.  
 The Prince's Tenure in his Roofs of Gold,  
 Ends like the Peasant's homelier Hold;  
 [65] Life's but a Road, and he who travels right,  
 Treats Fortune as an Inn, and rests his Night.

## VI

- Ever changing, ever new,  
 Thy Scenes, O *Grongar!* cannot tire the View:  
 Lowly Vallies, waving Woods,  
 [70] Windy Summits, wildly high,  
 Rough, and rustling in the Sky!  
 The pleasaht<sup>a</sup> Seat, the ruin'd Tower;  
 The naked Rock, the rosy Bower;  
 The Village and the Town, the Palace and the Farm,  
 [75] Each does, on each, reflect a doubled Charm;  
 As Pearls look brighter on an Æthiop's Arm. }

## VII

Southward, along the Mountain's waving Side,  
 The Vale grows liberal, and the Prospect wide.

<sup>a</sup> *Sic* in original.

- Glowing, beneath a kind and purple Sky,  
 [80] Broad flower-dress'd Meadows and rich Pastures lie.  
 Green Hedges, in long Parallels, are seen;  
 And silv'ry Lawns draw Streaks of Light between:  
 Distant, those *Thorns* diminish'd scarce appear;  
 As Dangers scape, unseen, that are not *near*.  
 [85] Smiling, like this fair Prospect, soft and gay,  
 The flatt'ring Glass of Hope our *Future* shows;  
 And Ills, *at hand*, their Face, unmask'd display,  
 And Fortune *rougher* still when *nearer*, grows:  
 Still we tread, tir'd, along the same deep Way;  
 [90] And still the *present* proves a *cloudy* Day.  
 O, may I ever with my self agree,  
 Nor hope the unpossess'd Delights I see!  
 Nobly content, within some silent Shade,  
 My Passions calm, and my proud Wishes laid:  
 [95] Ne'er may Desire's rough *Sea* beneath me roll,  
 Drown my wish'd Peace, and *tempest* all my Soul!  
 While, idly busy, I but beat the Air,  
 And, lab'ring after Bliss, embosom Care!

## VIII

- Here, while on humble Earth, unmark'd I lie,  
 [100] I subject *Heav'n* and *Nature* to my Eye;  
 Soild, my Joys, and my free Thoughts run high.  
 For me, this soft'ning Wind in *Zephyrs* sings,  
 And in yon flow'ry Vale perfumes his Wings.  
 To sooth my Ear, those Waters murmur deep;  
 [105] To shade my Eye, these bow'ry Woodbines creep.  
 Wanton, to yield me Sport, these Birds fly low;  
 And a sweet *Chase* of Harmony bestow.  
 Like me too yon sweet Stream serenely glides;  
 Just *views* and *quits* the Charms which tempt its Sides:  
 [110] Calmly regardless, hast'ning to the Sea,  
 As I, thro' *Life*, shall reach *Eternity*.

If we take the first version as a whole, we find that it is, though mainly in the manner of the eighteenth century, yet reasonably fresh and varied. As for the verse form, we find that the opening stanza, while showing traces of Dryden and Pope, is something of a cross between the introductory lines of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* on the one hand and the more lilting measures of those two poems on the other. The rest of the poem, apart from the lightly lyrical sixth stanza, consists of iambic pentameters rhymed variously, though with a tendency toward the couplet, and though interrupted now and then by shorter lines or by a stress on the opening syllables, as in lines 17-24. In substance the poem, while fre-

quently conventional in diction and heavy with eighteenth century moralization, is set off from most of the verse of that day by description of scenery which Dyer has looked upon for himself and liked for its own sake. The opening lines of the seventh and eighth stanzas, for example, show close observation and genuine delight in the presence of natural objects. The fourth stanza, which is even better, is all but free from the inevitable lesson and in itself refutes the statement that this version of the poem "was not significant."

For the purposes of comparison only a portion of the second version need be quoted. The opening 64 lines, corresponding to the opening 44 of the first, read thus in Chalmers, with whom Thomas's reprint is in substantial agreement:<sup>4</sup>

- Silent nymph, with curious eye!  
 Who, the purple evening, lie  
 On the mountain's lonely van,  
 Beyond the noise of busy man;  
 [5] Painting fair the form of things,  
 While the yellow linnet sings;  
 Or the tuneful nightingale  
 Charms the forest with her tale;—  
 Come, with all thy various dues,  
 [10] Come and aid thy sister Muse;  
 Now, while Phœbus riding high,  
 Gives lustre to the land and sky!  
 Grongar Hill invites my song,  
 Draw the landscape bright and strong;  
 [15] Grongar, in whose mossy cells  
 Sweetly musing Quiet dwells;  
 Grongar, in whose silent shade,  
 For the modest Muses made,  
 So oft I have, the evening still,  
 [20] At the fountain of a rill,  
 Sate upon a flowery bed,  
 With my hand beneath my head;  
 While stray'd my eyes o'er Towy's flood,  
 Over mead and over wood,  
 [25] From house to house, from hill to hill,  
 Till Contemplation had her fill.

<sup>4</sup> The following sixty-four lines were already in type before I secured a transcript of them from the Lewis text. The Lewis text varies but slightly from the Chalmers, however, and the variations are mainly in punctuation and spelling. The only verbal difference worth noting is the use of *hues* for *dues* in line 9.

- About his chequer'd sides I wind,  
And leave his brooks and meads behind,  
And groves, and grottoes where I lay,  
[30] And vistas shooting beams of day:  
Wide and wider spreads the vale,  
As circles on a smooth canal:  
The mountains round, unhappy fate!  
Sooner or later, of all height,  
[35] Withdraw their summits from the skies,  
And lessen as the others rise:  
Still the prospect wider spreads,  
Adds a thousand woods and meads;  
Still it widens, widens still,  
[40] And sinks the newly-risen hill.  
Now, I gain the mountain's brow,  
What a landscape lies below!  
No clouds, no vapours intervene;  
But the gay, the open scene  
[45] Does the face of Nature show,  
In all the hues of Heaven's bow!  
And, swelling to embrace the light,  
Spreads around beneath the sight.  
Old castles on the cliffs arise,  
[50] Proudly towering in the skies!  
Rushing from the woods, the spires  
Seem from hence ascending fires!  
Half his beams Apollo sheds  
On the yellow mountain-heads!  
[55] Gilds the fleeces of the flocks,  
And glitters on the broken rocks!  
Below me trees unnumber'd rise,  
Beautiful in various dyes:  
The gloomy pine, the poplar blue,  
[60] The yellow beech, the sable yew,  
The slender fir that taper grows,  
The sturdy oak with broad-spread boughs.  
And beyond the purple grove,  
Haunt of Phyllis, queen of love!

The entire second version is typified, so far as changes are concerned, by the above excerpt. All we need note in addition is that the version closes, not with a comparison of the poet's life to a stream, but with a recurrence to the spirit of the piece. Quiet may not be found in courts, we are told; it treads grass and flowers on the meads and mountain-heads,

"And often, by the murmuring rill,  
Hears the thrush, while all is still,  
Within the groves of Grongar Hill."

When we examine the passage quoted from the second version, we find that, despite transpositions, combinations, additions, and innumerable small changes, it is in substance but slightly altered from the first. Moralization, to be sure, may seem diminished, but this would not be the case were our extract taken from another section of the poem. Sometimes the thought, as in the two paragraphs that replace the short third stanza, is expanded, clarified, and more pleasingly stated; sometimes, on the other hand, obscurity results from the changes, as in the substitution of "Silent nymph" for "Fancy" in the very first line. The one respect in which the substance is markedly altered for the better is in the improvement of the descriptions. The early mention of the yellow linnet and the nightingale prepares us for a closer observation of external nature. The promise is by way of being fulfilled when we are shown how the surrounding mountains, as the poet reaches higher levels, withdraw their summits from the skies and give place to peaks more removed. Lines 51-56 are far more vivid and concise than the corresponding passage (lines 39-44) in the first version, and are followed by a concrete portrayal of various kinds of trees. But the changes are not invariably felicitous, and we must regret in particular that the genuine intimacy and quaint, feeling fancy of lines 33-38 in the original did not prevent the passage from being deleted when the poem was revised.

In form far more than in substance the second version departs from the first. It alternates trochaic with iambic pentameters with a freedom like that of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. Occasionally it reminds us of Shakespeare. Dyer may well have modeled line 24, for example:

"Over mead and over wood"

upon

"Thorough bush, thorough brier."

The superiority of the second version to the first is to be explained chiefly through its metrical medium. Instead of the heavy, pedestrian measure of its predecessor, it has a measure that is light and agile. The effect is extraordinary. Grace and clearness of expression are amazingly enhanced. From a cumbersome heaviness we are carried into a quiet, lilting charm, and this is accomplished with almost a minimum of change.



On the whole, therefore, the difference in merit between the two versions is not so great as has been surmised. The second is better in two ways. It shows a considerable advance in the precise delineation of natural objects, though here the improvement was based upon a tendency already manifested, and may be confined, for all practical purposes, to some score of scattered lines. It employs, in the second place, a far happier verse form which rids it, automatically almost, of the worst of its stilted phraseology and gives it wings. Its superiority cannot be denied, yet may almost be said to be outward rather than inward.

The increased intimacy and accuracy of description and the substitution of one form of verse for another wrought a sufficient change in the poem, however, for us to inquire how they came about. Partly, we need not question, from Dyer's maturing powers. Partly, it is to be surmised, from a closer knowledge of the metrical technique and the many individual scenes, distinctly drawn in a few lines, of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. And partly, I should say, from accident also. Another and spirited piece which Dyer contributed to Savage's volume was *The Country Walk*. It contained a few realistic descriptions, such as that of the barnyard. It employed the Miltonic measure, or at least a measure which borrowed something from Milton and is superior, on the whole, to that employed in the first version of *Grougar Hill*. What more likely, therefore, than that Dyer had the discernment to perceive this dual advantage of *The Country Walk*, and the resolution to remodel the other and favorite poem in accordance therewith? The citation of a few lines from *The Country Walk* may be permitted. The following are peculiarly apropos:

"Up *Grougar Hill* I labour now,  
And catch at last his bushy brow.  
Oh how fresh, how pure the Air!  
Let me breathe a little here.  
Where am I, Nature? I descry  
Thy Magazine before me lie!  
Temples!—and Towns!—and Tow'rs!—and Woods!  
And Hills!—and Vales!—and Fields!—and Floods!  
Crowding before me, edg'd around  
With naked Wilds, and barren Ground."

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